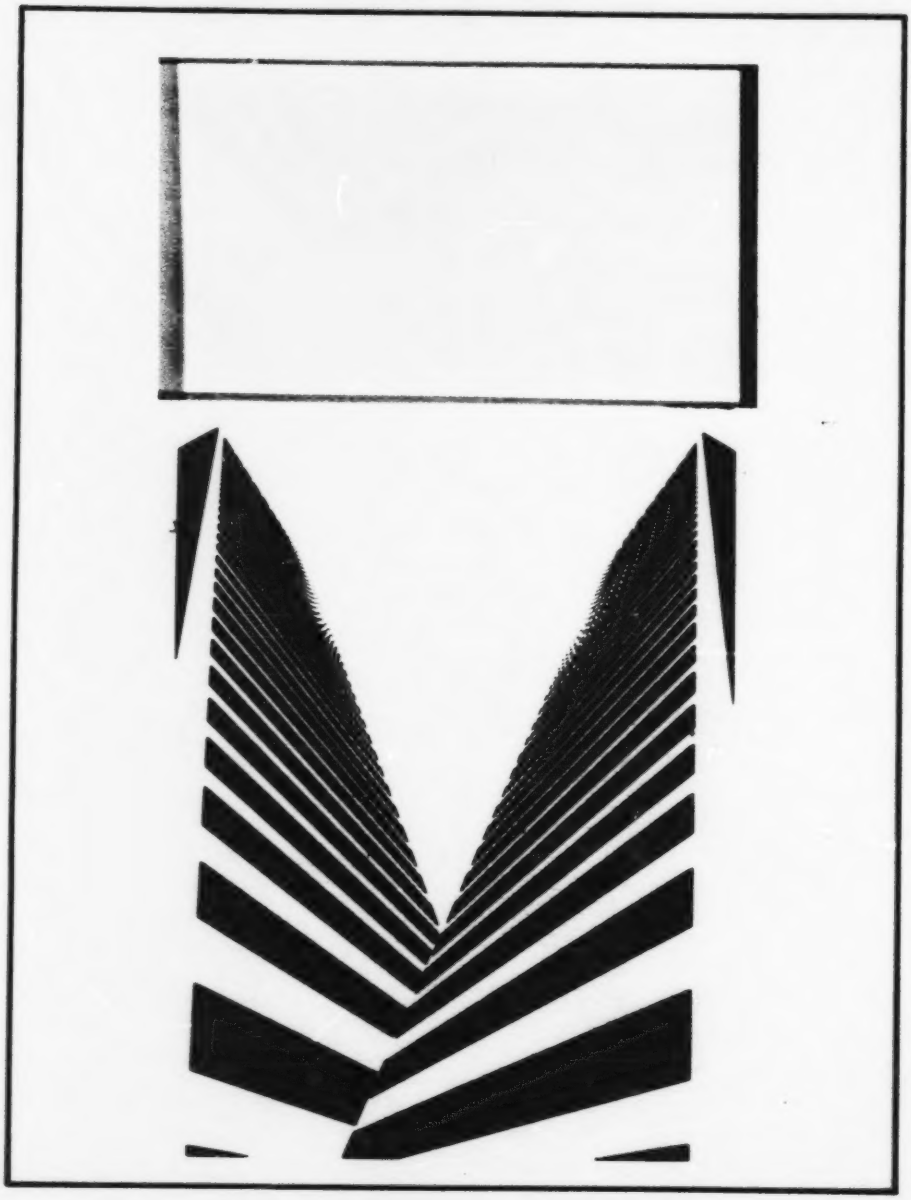
WORK AND THE QUALITY OF FAMILY LIFE

BACKGROUND PAPER



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JOB SHARING

RESOURCE CENTRE

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In the last decade, there has been increasing interest in examining alternative work schedules. Job sharing, which is only one of the several alternative suggested options, is perhaps the least understood. In order to focus specifically on the issues surrounding job sharing, it is necessary to first discuss the reasons why alternative work arrangements are currently being considered.

Traditional Work Schedules and Changing Families

"The concept of standardized work time is a creation of the industrialized age" (Macphee, 1980, 11). Now, however, there is a growing feeling that traditional work patterns may not be applicable to changing economic needs, changing family needs and changing family structures. It is becoming increasingly clear that present economic growth lacks the capacity to provide jobs for all who want them (Olmstead, 1978). In times of economic recession, attempts are being made to prevent layoffs and retain valued employees.

Families are changing. Perhaps the most significant factor is the increase of women in the work force. In 1960, women made up 31% of the Ontario labour force. In 1980, the proportion rose to 42%. Current forecasts predict that by 2000, women will make up one-half the total work force (Coffey, 1982). A rise in the number of single parent families, both male and female headed, has similarly directed attention to the worlds of work and family life (Kanter, 1977). Furthermore, the multiple earner family has become commonplace. The incidence of the dual career family has increased dramatically (Newton, 1982). Permanent part-time work, job sharing and other flexible arrangements are becoming attractive options. "People used to feel they needed to plug into the one person, one job routine... that's changing. Many want to nurture their family and have a career." (Christian Science Monitor, 1980).

The nature of the labour force is changing. Not only have women in the prime age bracket entered the work force but demographic trends show that the population is aging. Optional work schedules could allow for a transition period during the last stages of work life before retirement. The growing body of literature relating individual career development to stages of family life and the adult life cycle has stressed the importance of scheduling work to fit these stages.

Today's employees often have a different view of work than they did previously. "Trends from survey and behavioural data indicate a strong and growing preference on the part of more workers for more flexibility in determining work time arrangements." (Best, 1981, 164). Unfortunately, work is often organized so that the individual has little or no control. A study by Yankelovich shows a growing preference for alternative lifestyles, more self-control and more interesting jobs (Yankelovich, 1976). In another study, college students felt that they were entitled to participate in decisions that affect their work (56 percent), the right to work (27 percent) and an interesting job (17 percent) (Cohen and Gadon, 1978).

Although job sharing is not economically feasible for some workers, the increased desire for more leisure and personal time has become evident as money becomes worth less and less and interest in reduced work load increasing. The Wisconsin job sharing project, a federally funded program, surveyed 82,000 employees. Six percent expressed interest in reducing their hours (Winnipeg Free Press, 1978). According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, surveys have shown that an increasing number of full-time workers are willing to forego money for leisure time. There is still the traditional view that a worker who does not fit into the 40-hour-per-week model has a lower commitment. However, studies on occupational and life stress and the realtionship between work and family life have pointed out the societal pressures for more lifestyle alternatives (Burke and Bradshaw, 1981; Kanter, 1977).

Until the last decade, the individual had prime responsibility for juggling the dual responsibilities of work and other interests. More recently, researchers have begun to assess rationally our established attitudes to work time and to develop systems which are appropriate to today's needs. New methods of working have been identified. A recent study by the National Council for Alternative Work Patterns noted that "these new ways of working enable employees to mesh job demands with their personal and family needs" (New York Times, 1980).

It is useful to define briefly the following new work models: work sabbaticals, work sharing and job sharing. These three options have been chosen because they offer reduced work hours to create flexibility. The more established arrangements such as flextime and the compressed work week do not depart

from the traditional 40-hour-week schedule and are not discussed in this paper (Olmsted, 1978).

1. Work Sabbaticals

A sabbatical is a 'period of rest that occurs in regular cycles" (Olmsted, 1978.25). Traditionally, sabbaticals have been offered by educational institutions for periods varying from a month to a year. Salaries range from full benefits to a fixed percentage depending on years of service. Work leave, other than maternal, paternal or sick leave, is an option that a few companies are promoting in order to give some measure of flexibility to their employees.

2. Work Sharing

"Work sharing is an attempt to combat unemployment by reducing the number of hours each employee works rather than laying off employees when there is a reduction in demand for labour." (Metz et al., 1981. 1) Best describes work sharing as "a short term strategy temporarily reducing work time, and as a reduction of work time among the employed to create jobs for those who are unemployed." (1981. 2) Essentially, work sharing is government or employer initiated, usually on a temporary basis to reduce work time in response to an economic recession. Workers earn a salary commensurate with their reduced hours and are partially covered by unemployment insurance to compensate for the hours they do not work.

3. Job Sharing

In the literature surveyed, there appears to be some confusion among the terms job splitting, job sharing and job pairing. Olmsted's definition is perhaps the broadest and describes the essential issues of job sharing. "A shared job is a voluntary work arrangement in which two people hold responsibility for what was formerly one full-time position (or three people hold responsibility for two jobs). Salary and benefits are pro-rated according to time worked (where possible)." (Olmsted, 1977, 78). This definition has been applied broadly and has included positions split vertically by people with different skills and by people with complementary skills. It refers to both collaborative and independent partnerships (Olmsted, 1978.15). This definition accounts for individual differences in the job sharing arrangement and accounts

for the many interpretations in the literature.

Each of the above models initiated either separately or together can offer the flexibility to help change economic and family needs. To further examine job sharing issues, the remainder of this paper will examine the following: who is job sharing?; factors to consider; advantages and disadvantages; union views; future implications; and conclusions.

Who is Job Sharing?

It has been stated that "job sharing will be one of the major options of the 1980's as work styles change to meet individual needs." (Scarr, 1982) The increasing incidence of job sharing gives credence to that statement. Job sharing is an attractive option to people at certain times in their lives, although it is estimated that only 1% of the working population would actually choose this option (Christian Science Monitor, 1980). The question of who does share is an interesting one. According to Olmsted, part-time work has generally been confined to low-skill, low wage jobs in the clerical, service and sales occupations (Financial Post, 1981). However, job sharing is opening up positions in the professional world as well.

Two early experiments in the sixties, carried out by Catalyst Career Center, paved the route. In Boston, fifty social workers shared jobs. In Farmingham and seven other communities in Massachusetts, two hundred and forty teachers shared teaching responsibilities. In both experiments, results from employees and employers were positive (Catalyst, 1971).

The majority of job sharers are women. Indeed, women have initiated many of the possibilities. Gretl Meier surveyed 238 job sharers and found that 77% were female sharers, 19% were male/female sharers and only 4% were male (1979). The majority were job sharing in the public sector in such occupations as teaching, social work, and administration and libraries. Meltz, Reid and Swartz state that there are fewer opportunities in the private sector because of the conservative nature of the business world, because of the fear of increased costs and because of the assumed difficulties. However, as job sharing becomes better defined and more accepted, it is suggested that opportunities in the business world will increase (1981).

In the American context, examples of job sharing are plentiful. In Canada, where job sharing situations are not as formalized, examples are fewer. A Globe and Mail article describes some of the situations that do exist. Sixteen female social workers and psychologists fill the equivalent of eight positions at the Toronto Board of Education. In Wentworth County, some teachers are voluntarily splitting a full-day teaching load. The reactions of the workers involved are positive. As one job sharer says, "I don't feel like I'm on a treadmill anymore" (Globe and Mail, 1980).

The Successful Job Sharing Experience

When planning a job sharing experience, there are several factors that must be considered by both the individual and the employing organization. Advance planning must be done to ensure success. Time arrangements of a job sharing experience can vary considerably. For example, Joy Baxter and Eileen O'Neil shared work hours by working three days and two days each on alternate weeks (Ottawa Citizen, 1980). Two dentists, Dr. Eva Rudnicki and Dr. Linda Lee, shared their job by splitting the hours of each day (Globe and Mail, 1980). The litature is full of examples of various shared time arrangements. However, expectations must be discussed before and during the experience. Because there is a wide range of working time, communication becomes important. Systems of communication such as extensive use of the telephone, written notes, daily logs and planned overlaps have all been suggested. It is also necessary to think through ways in which work will be coordinated. In some cases, job re-design may be necessary. Personal work styles, attitudes, salary expectsions, and evaluation procedures must also be discussed. New Ways to Work, a pioneering group in the field of job sharing, offers consultation, counselling and practical advice to both the individual and the organization (see appendix for other resource groups).

Advantages of Job Sharing

What are the advantages of job sharing for the individual and for the employer? The individual who voluntarily chooses to share a job has more leisure time for pursuing recreational activities or for family tasks. More flexibility and less pressure give the individual a chance to update skills

and further educational goals. Job sharing may lead to improved quality of part-time work because of the responsibility level of the job available. Fifty-eight academic job sharing couples were interviewed as to their response about their chosen work options. They stressed that the leisure time and reduced levels of stress were positive factors in their choices. The research concluded that job sharing couples tended to be more productive (New York Times, 1980).

There are also many advantages for the employer. The New Ways to Work publications offer the most extensive list. The following appear to be the major advantages: increased flexibility, reduced absenteeism, affirmative action tool, increased options.

1. Increased Flexibility

With two people sharing one job, time can be used more effectively. Peak periods during the day can be covered and services can be extended to maximize time pressure. Job sharers can overlap work hours in a crisis, fill in for each other to cover holidays and substitute for each other in case of illness. Joy Baxter and Eileen O'Neil worked for a year as joint counsellors at the Canada Employment Centre. Their immediate supervisor commented on the fact that the key to their success was the flexibility that both women exhibited.

2. Reduced Absenteeism and Turnover

Because job sharers do have more flexibility, they can trade off with each other to cover for illness and other absences. Their increased amount of personal time gives them opportunities to handle errands outside of working hours. Because of the voluntary nature of job sharing, turnover appears to be lower. There is the argument that turnover may be increased, since for some people, job sharing may be the first step into the labour force (Clutterbuck, 1979). However, if one of the sharers does leave, the other can train the new partner.

3. Increased Productivity

Two studies have documented an increase in productivity among job sharers. Co-workers appear to have increased energy and higher morale. In collaborative situations, there are two people to catch mistakes and discuss issues and procedures. The chance to interact can stimulate creativity and encourage problem solving. Furthermore, job sharers often have varied backgrounds and bring complementary skills to their task.

4. Affirmative Action Tool

Employers, by initiating job sharing, attract women and others from minority groups. Women with young children have an opportunity to retain their place in the work force, thus saving the time and money in retraining and recruitment.

5. Alternative Options

Job sharing provides options for both ends of the age spectrum by allowing time for study, personal interests and eases the transition both into and out of the work force. Physically handicapped people or those with poor health can also benefit from such a scheme.

Disadvantages of Job Sharing

What are the disadvantages of job sharing? For the individual, along with shared responsibilities, goes a shared paycheque. Benefits also have to be shared and usually the individual employee will have to pay some of the costs. Since most part-time employees do not receive benefits, this factor is not necessarily negative. The job sharer must be prepared to give up individual ownership of work. A collaborative rather than a competitive attitude is necessary and may not suit all people. Because of traditional social and cultural attitudes toward work, some people may suffer a loss of self-esteem if they are not employed on a full-time basis.

The disadvantages of job sharing for the employer are more complex. The two main factors, from the employer's point of view, appear to be a general resistance to change and the fear of increased costs.

1. General Resistance

A change in work scheduling is bound to meet with some resistance. There is likely to be an inconvenience factor for any organization when a new policy is introduced (Olmsted, 1978). The resistance to job sharing stems mainly from management's commitment to the one person-one job concept. The key benefit to this system is that accountability can be fixed to one person. Secondly, many employers question the commitment of part-time workers, although evidence has shown the reverse to be true (Olmsted, 1977). Job sharing can be seen as ana-

logous to flex-time as both are innovative strategies that attempt to meet the needs of individual workers. Lufthansa employees in Germany on flex time were found to interact more effectively and to assume greater initiative and responsibility. They were also more considerate of co-workers' time and as a result time was better utilized. Commitment was obviously high (Lazer, 1975). Job sharing has not become widespread enough for it to be deemed totally acceptable. Thirdly, as Reid points out, "when (the economy) is not booming and there is less turnover and fewer vacant jobs (the employers) don't have the incentive to try such an innovative thing" (Globe and Mail, 1980).

2. Increased Costs

Organizations fear that double staff will mean double administrative and supervisory support (Macphee, 1980; Merkin, 1978). According to Olmsted, job sharers appear to be more task oriented and more highly motivated. Merkin also points to the cost of additional expenses in training two people instead of one. Others agree but mention that some internal training on the job will occur. Employers question the use of unproductive time spent on communication. Communication breakdowns which might affect the rest of the organization are also questioned.

The most significant objection to job sharing relates to employers' fear of increased costs of fringe benefits. In Sharing the Work: An Analysis of the Issues in Work Sharing and Job Sharing, the authors have based their conclusions about costs on a computer model. They suggest that such fears are largely unfounded (1981). In Canada, the Canada Pension Plan, Unemployment Insurance and Workman's Compensation are statutory per capita benefits. Prorating is not possible. However, other benefits such as health care can easily be split between two employees. "The results (of the study) indicate that job sharing has no significant effect when full-time employees earn $8,000 a year or less, but when they earn $20,000 a year, it increases the firm's contribution costs by 1.91 per cent." (Meltz, et al., 1981, 82) There is an increase in costs due to fringe benefits and replacement costs. "However, the important advantages could reduce part or all of these costs." (Meltz, et al., 1981, 30).

Job Sharing and Trade Unions

What do trade unions think of job sharing? Union support varies as job sharing is not yet widely accepted or understood. Unions fear that job sharing

might generate conflicts between full- and part-time workers (Nollen, 1976). If the following conditions are met, unions tend to be in favour of job sharing:

- increased employment for union members;
- greater flexibility of hours for workers wanting to work less than full-time;
- a chance for non-union members to acquire skills so they will join unions and increase membership (Meltz et al., 1981);
- protection of rights and needs of employees who want and need full-time work (Olmsted);
- full payment of union dues by each of the co-workers;
- protection needed for less of overtime pay and reductions in base salary (Macphee, 1980).

Unions fear that job sharing will:

- reduce their ability to press for wage increases;
- require a union to reapply for certification for a new unit including both part-time and full-time employees; at present the Ontario Labour Relations Board places part-time employees in separate bargaining units (Weeks, 1978);
- make it more difficult to organize part-time workers than full-time workers (Meltz, et al., 1981).

Individual union members are currently beginning to want part-time work options. There is a great concern that such options remain voluntary as most people still want and need full-time work (Olmsted, 1978, 22).

Implications for Job Sharing for the Future

The need and desire for more flexible and reduced work hours has been mentioned. The long term social benefits of keeping people employed are important; it is therefore a positive move to develop alternative work models. In the United States, a national network of job sharing resource groups is being formed. It seems that an interest in job sharing exists, but is just beginning to be translated into active practice (Olmsted, 1977).

The following policies have been suggested by Meltz, et al., for further consideration:

1. The Government should specify ceilings on contributions to Unemployment Insurance, the Canada Pension Plan and Workmen's Compensation in terms of hourly rather than annual earnings to make job sharing economically advantageous to the individual and the organization.

2. The Goverment should use retraining funds and Unemployment Insurance to share costs of job sharing with firms.

More research is advisable. The following points outline the most feasible areas for future study:

1. An analysis of possibilities of job sharing in various Canadian industries and occupations could be attempted. Case studies of possible job sharing might be conducted in one or more of the following situations:

   - a high proportion of women or older workers or both;
   - an inability to recruit full-time workers because of the lack of qualified persons in a likelihood that an adequate supply of persons ... would be available, especially if
   - the jobs require skills that could be learned while job sharing.

   (Meltz, et al., 1981, 79)

2. A further examination of the implementation policies and the kind of conceptual framework needed.

3. An examination of the methods of how job sharing can be better understood.

4. An analysis of how to choose the best time/work options for a particular worker, within a particular organization.

5. Further analysis of how job sharing can effect the work/family interface.

The statements of Henry Morgan at the Conference New Management Initiatives for Working Parents are particularly appropriate. "We have to get out of our belief that there is one kind of family, one concept of work, and one concept of dealing with people. Parents are individuals, families are different, work sites can be tailored to meet needs." (Baden, 1981, 171) It is evident that job sharing is a strategy that can address the issues of work and the quality of family life.

APPENDIX:

LIST OF RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE OR ORGANIZATIONS INTERESTED IN JOB SHARING

These organizations will provide information about job sharing in general:

1. National Council for Alternative Work Patterns Inc.
   1302-18th Street N.W.
   Suite 203
   Washington, DC. 20036
   (202) 466-4467

2. New Ways to Work
   457 Kingsley Avenue
   Palo Alta, California 94301
   (415) 321-9675

3. Cataylst Career and Family Centre
   14 East-60th Street
   New York, New York 10022
   (212) PL9-9700

These organizations will provide personal counselling for anyone interested in job sharing. They are not placement agencies although some maintain banks or employers who will hire job sharers.

1. Focus on Part-Time Careers
   509 10th Avenue East
   Seattle, Washington 98102
   (206) 329-7918

2. Job Sharers Inc.
   P.O. Box 1542
   Arlington, Virginia 22210
   (703) 893-8916 or
   (703) 533-9298

3. New Ways to Work
   (see the Palo Alto address)
   149-9th Street
   San Francisco, California 94103
   (415) 552-2949

4. Flexible Careers
   37 South Wabash
   Chicago, Illinois 60603

5. Options for Women
   8419 Germantown Avenue
   Philadelphia, Pennslyvania 19118

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